THE EARLY DAYS OF WARDSBORO

Charter Was Granted in 1780—Something About the Traditions of the Town—Two Old Houses Which Can Be Located—Named from William Ward

A lady whom I was consulting concerning data for this paper said she wondered at my being asked to write a Wardsboro paper and I asured her I wondered at it too. I have ordinarily the utmost faith in Mrs. Kidder's good judgment but there seems to be an opinion that she should have asked a native to write local history and not to have entrusted the sacred charge to a rank outsider and a stranger in a strange land.

You see a Vermonter like a poet must be born and not made but I will try, however, to make myself over for this one occasion and then if you still feel me too alien to have attempted the task, remember that many of my ancesters counted Vermont as their birthplace and the first soldier to fall from this state in the Revolutionary war was an ancester of mine and bore my maiden name. Remember, too, that my husband's great grandfather came to the town among it's earliest settlers and tilled that beautiful hill-side toward South Wardsboro and that many of you still own, relegated to your kitchens and back porches, old split-bottom chairs, erect of back, simple of outline and made by one, Simeon Fisher, jr., once your collector and town clerk and our children's great grandfather. So while you are overlooking Mrs. Kidder's slip in judgment, if you can, I will touch briefly upon the early history of the state in order to properly set the stage for the coming of the settlers into Wardsboro.

In 1649 Champlain, a Frenchman, voyaging up the lake, to which he gave his name, looking eastward out upon the high snow-capped mountains was the first white man to set eyes on Vermont.

At that time the territory he looked upon was traversed by Indian tribes, principally the Iroquois and they had perhaps made temporary homes there, but the only traces of a permanent Indian settlement in this state far outdate this period. There is, in fact, no clue as to whether the Iroquois or the Waubanakee were the fashioners of the ancient pottery and the rude implements and weapons of stone found deep buried there. But if the Iroquois, they long before Champlain's day abandoned Vermont as a home, for not one Iroquois name remains on mountain, lake, rock or river. It is supposed that the land lying about Lake Champlain was debatable ground among those aboriginal tribes and never for any length of time was inhabited.

The French and English colonies in America continued the rivalries and jealousies of the old world and were in constant hostility here. From 1690 to 1760 there were repeated wars between them. The French made allies of the Indians and it is due to this that settlement by the English was so hazardous until after the English had thoroughly subdued the French.

During these wars Vermont was repeatedly crossed and recrossed by military bands and a few military settlements sprang up—among them Fort Dummer, in 1724, the first permanent settlement in Windham county and for that matter the first in the state. During these wars also, grants of land lying within the present limits of the state were made by Massachusetts, New Hampshire and New York, and each state laid claim to the entire territory.

The settlers, however, under Ethan Allen organized themselves into companies and agreed to protect each other against all claims of these states and all efforts to drive them from their land. They were called the "Green Mountain Boys," and their opposition was so determined that a bloody interstate contest seemed inevitable until the breaking out of the Revolutionary war engrossed the minds and hearts of all. The settlers, however, intent on still maintaining their rights, placed the affairs of each town in the hands of a committee. These committees met in general convention whenever occasion of common need called for it.

Such a general convention in 1777 adopted a constitution, proclaimed the settlers' independence, chose representatives to Congress and asked admission to the confederacy.

Meantime the settlers were rendering valiant service to the other states in resisting English dominion but they asked no favors for themselves and enjoyed none of the benefits of the Union. For 13 years, Vermont was kept out of the union and not until 1791 was she admitted as the 14th state. The constitution as originally drafted remains materially the same today. The name was at first New Connecticut, but was later changed to "Verd Mont"—the green mountain state. This is most appropriate for the entire state is divided by its magnificient range of blue-green mountains which dominate it.

The county of Windham was originally a part of the old Cumberland county, which in 1781 was divided into Windham, Windsor and Orange counties. As before stated the first settlement in the county was Fort Dummer in 1724. Newfane's original charter was granted in 1753. South Wardsboro was an unbroken wilderness years after Newfane was a flourishing settlement.

Imagination can scarcely picture the surroundings of those early settlers—the vast and silent wilderness, the mountains clothed to their very tops with the primeval forest, trees of immense size, dating back to the Mayflower, perhaps even so far back as the discovery of America, the tangled under-brush, never before trod by the foot of the white man; the wild animals, bear, deer, panther, lynx; birds, unafraid because unacquainted with the ways of men, wild turkeys, wild pigeons, game in the greatest abundance.

The forest held in dominion every foot of the ground and before a man could build the first crude shelter for his family he must clear a space of trees. Naturally those early homes were made of logs, not like the trim new log cabins which are so popular in summer camps today, but rough and unattractive with earthen floors. The furniture was such as could be fashioned at home with ax and saw, the chairs being often no more than stumps of trees. The dishes, too, were made largely of wood until a later date, when crockery and pewter were imported from Europe. At first there were no window panes, just wooden shutters to close in bad weather. There was always a huge fire place with a built-in oven at the side and a crane, on which hung the great kettle.

The cooking was exceedingly simple. Bread was mostly of rye and Indian flour, used half and half. When white flour was obtainable the bread was raised with home-made potato yeast. Soda was obtained by soaking cob or wood ashes in water and the water dissolved sufficiently for the necessary chemicals to raise the biscuits or cake. To be sure, the resulting saffron color would scarcely pass muster today, and I can't vouch for the flavor, but the long-ago boys and girls who were raised on that diet spoke eloquently of it's nourishing qualities. Modern youngsters would doubtless turn up their noses at two other favorite dishes of those days—pumpkin johnny cake and dried apple johnny cake. Sweets and pastry, such as we are accustomed to, were practically unknown.

In dress the settlers wore almost home-made. Shoes were made from the skins of animals grown upon the farm, tanned at a near-by tannery and made by an itinerate cobbler. Summer clothes were of linen, the flax for the making of which was grown by the settler himself. The women prepared the thread and spun the cloth. The resulting fabric was very beautiful and today there are imitations of it popular for fancy needle work.

All the wool was home-grown, too, and dresses, coats, trousers, mittens and hose were made of the home-spun yarn.

Even the girls wore bonnets and a woman of 35 began wearing caps such as grandmothers of today hesitate to put on at 80.

Housekeeping was very simple, no telephone to answer, no voluminous correspondence such as people of the present time indulge in, no vast hoard of magazines, papers and books to read and keep up in. Garments once fashioned of home-spun wore for years and descended all the way down, from big sister to the very tiniest member of the family. There were no big houses, no great quantities of bedding, china and silver to care for. Visits were infrequent. The life was simple and wholesome and exceedingly frank. Modern pretense, modern sham, the artificial local social standards, no less harmful than they are false, were entirely wanting. Everyone was poor, everyone worked and children were trained early to assume responsibility. Being in a new country there was a comradeship and a co-operation in the face of common need and mutual danger.

The church was the social center as well as the spiritual. Much of the preaching was controversial and long were the arguments among the people regarding doctrine. It was a stern, hard life indeed, not only in religious belief but in actual practice.

Travel was largely by horseback for the roads were mere bridle paths. Some times the man and wife rode on the same horse but more frequently the husband walked ahead, carrying his old flintlock ready to defend his little family, or an ax to hew out a path for the horse's feet. Bad indeed were the roads but it was due then to dire necessity and not to such causes as we later settlers are forced to endure.

Matches were still one of the dreams of the future and fires were obtained by means of the clumsy flint and tinder. The housewife did not intend to let her fires go out and sometimes if she did it meant a hasty visit to the nearest neighbor.

There was very little cash in those days and trade was carried on by the exchange of commodities. The settlers were fortunate in never fearing the defalcation of some bank cashier, nor any great financial panic. Their savings were safely ensconsed in an old stocking and snugly hidden in the bed, making a comfortable little hummock that the wife could keep her eye upon as she hurried about her duties. Or sometimes the family treasure was concealed in the chinks of the logs, of which tradition tells us there was an abundance, even in the smallest cabin, to have concealed a fortune and incidentally to provide for very up-to-date ventilation.

The cattle of those days were what were called "native stock" and were importations from the Spanish West Indies and later were mixed with stock brought from France and Holland. A winter dairy was unheard of. The cows were allowed to range at will and to graze on what they could find. "Bringing home the cows" must have been serious business then and not one to be entrusted to the children nor delayed until the shades of night were falling.

When vehicles were introduced they were at the best heavy and lumbering structures, without springs and other contrivances for comfort. The conditions of the roads necessitated great strength and solidarity and traveling that way must have been anything but comfortable.

Farming was, of course, the principle occupation but carried on under such difficulties as would seem insurmountable today. The small cleared spaces were cumbered with stumps, some of which persisted for 60 years or more after the trees were cut. While they lasted the plow could be used but little and the small crops of corn and potatoes were put in with a hoe among the stumps. Then after the farmer had met the difficulties of trees and stumps he was face to face with another problem, that of stones. Indeed it almost seems as if there must have been giants in those days and that they had left colossal monuments of their energy in the miles of solid, old stone walls which mark out our fields.

Early settlements, so far as possible, were upon the hill tops to avoid the killing frosts which curtailed the summers in the valleys to the briefest period. I have no doubt that the cold was more severe at that time than now and that a great deal more snow fell then. Indeed, I believe that scientists tell us that the earth's surface is very slowly cooling and drying.

Into such a setting, into such difficulties as these came the first men and women to what is now known as Wardsboro.

The first people to arrive were a family named Davis, and their little son, born in 1779, was the first child born in the town. This family was followed immediately by two others, one of which gained eternal distinction by having two girls whose early marriages were the first in the town.

In the following fall of 1780, the charter was granted to William Ward of Newfane and 62 associates. It comprised the two towns of Dover and Wardsboro which were called the north and south districts.

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The first settlement was made in the woods back of South Wardsboro near the farm of Mr. Clifford Brown. But lack of harmony among the people soon led to a division along the lines of the present boundaries of the towns of Dover and Wardsboro and a new site was chosen for building the church and school house. These were located on the commons above South Wardsboro on land which still belongs to the town, the church being established in 1793 and the school in 1801. Up there, too, 100 years ago was the first post-office, safely intrusted to the minister who handled the mails for 30 years for the towns of Wardsboro, Somerset and Stratton.

It was a busy town those first 20 years after settlement began and during that time the largest population in the history of Wardsboro was reached. Among the industries developed in those days were a fulling and dressing mill for cloth in 1802, a wool-carding machine in 1806, and soon after a cabinet shop, a tannery, a blacksmith shop and a brick kiln.

Back as early as 1789 the wives could accompany the husbands on their way to the grist mill or saw mill and themselves visit the general store, where doubtless bargains were set forth with as many inducements as today.

It would be interesting to know the remedies used by that first doctor here—old Dr. Samuel Wheeler, away back before 1794. Medicine in those days was very different from what it is now. Doctors were not called for every little ailment and so their visits usually coincided with some great family crisis. And if tradition may be trusted, they gave honest service along with the immense pills and the bitter doses they dealt out to suffering humanity.

I find that early inn keepers were not held in the highest repute, the suspicion being that it was safe for weary travelers to guard against inside dangers as well as those without, while enjoying the hospitality of the early tavern. It would be interesting, too, to know whether Wardsboro's first inn, established in 1804 by Nathaniel Cheney deserved any such reputation.

Wages in those days were mere vanishing points. Teachers got so little as $24 for a winter's work and ministers must meet their expenses with such a yearly salary as $200. I suspect, too, that much of that was not cash, for I find day laborers were paid in potatoes and meal and other commodities.

Although steamship travel in 1829 and railroad travel in 1849 were possible up and down the Connecticut river, yet inland the old stage coach held dominion until 1880. There were well-established stage routes, and passengers, mail and freight were carried, our line being from Brattleboro to Arlington.

I do not wish to close my paper without telling some of the interesting traditions of the place.

I have found frequent references in the old records to the "great sickness," which swept through the town in 1813 and carried off many of the inhabitants. I am informed that it was spotted fever which was the old name for modern typhus or cerebro spinal meningitis.

There is a set of old crockery dishes in the once famous "Flowing Blue" pattern, owned by a family in this town. The owner's grandmother worked 18 weeks to pay for them, so I suspect the high cost of living is not an absolutely new problem.

Vermont was guilty in 1832 of the strangest political party on record. It was called "Anti-Masonic" and, needless to say, it perished in its infancy.

I find that West River is just a nick name. That stream bears the euphonious Indian name of "Wantastiect."

So far back as 1780 Wardsboro had a military organization that was famous later the state over for its splendid looking men, of tall stature and upright bearing, who were drilled to perfection and handsomely uniformed.

There are at least two old houses in the town which can be located with certainty. Those are the old schoolhouse on Charles Hoyt's land which is 101 years old, and the house which is now occupied by Albert Sage. This latter house is built of logs but is clapboarded to conceal it.

The baptismal names of those far-off men and women sound strange to our modern ears. What woman with suffragette leanings would enjoy being called "Submit" or "Waitstill?" The men's names were no less odd. I find on the town records such names as these, Bazeleel, Zadock, Elkanah, Salmon and Pardon.

Of your offices to be filled at town meeting was that of "horsebrander." Every animal, whether horse, cattle, sheep or swine, must be branded and this brand must be recorded in the town book. Some of the old records have preserved crude drawings of these means of identification.

History tells us that every town must have a good pair of stocks for the punishment of drunkards, blasphemers and liars. I wonder how that plan would work today. I respectfully submit the suggestion to the proper officials.

There is an interesting story told of William Ward for whom the town was named. He and some associates went up into Canada on a fur hunting expedition and while there were siezed as spies and thrown into prison. Before their release came, Mr. Ward had died there, an exile and under cruel suspicion.

Tradition tells us that a Wardsboro woman, "old mother White," was the last woman in Vermont or in any other civilized country on the globe, to be publically whipped. She had passed counterfeit money and the revolting affair took place on Newfane hill before a "large gathering of men, women and children," in the year 1807.

Wardsboro, too, was the home of the last man in the state to be imprisoned for debt. This was Noah Warren, an eccentric man, but thoroughly upright so far as records show. He had built a big brick house east of Wardsboro on land now owned by Messrs. Cobb and Reed. He had used bad judgment perhaps or he may have been the victim of misfortune. At any rate it seems strange to us in this day of broader judgment, that his debts should have constituted a misdemeanor and he be imprisoned for them. He was granted the freedom of the jail yard and he assisted in the building of immense stone walls on the old Kenney place on Newfane hill. These walls were six feet wide and were used as a parade ground for a company of Wardsboro and Newfane militia.

Some of the old "Blue Laws" are interesting to recall. "Counterfeiting was punishable by the loss of one ear, by branding with a "C" and by hard labor for life. Manslaughter seems not to have been considered so serious for its penalty was forfeiture of possessions, whipping and branding with an "M."

The body of a debtor, whether dead or alive, could be seized and bail was forfeited if the jailor gave up the body of a man dying in prison whose offence had been debts.

My hope is that you have enjoyed even in a small degree the facts I have gathered for you. It has been a most interesting task for me.

NOTES OF PROGRESS.

Activities of Civic and Commercial Organizations Which Help to Make a Greater Vermont.

A unique page of advertising in the handbook of the State Teachers' association is that taken by the Brattleboro board of trade, advertising Brattleboro as "The Town where Initiative and Progress Are In the Air."

Secretaries of commercial and civic organizations are earnestly requested to send notices of any changes in the list of officers and committees of their organizations to the secretary of the Greater Vermont association, James P. Taylor, Room 17, the Strong building, Burlington. The association desires to keep its lists of the officers and the committees of state organizations authoritative and up-to-date.

At the annual meeting of the Burlington Merchants' association October 18 T. B. Wright was nominated for the presidency, but declined to continue the work for another year, and Max Powell was unanimously elected president. Mr. Wright's administration has been notable in the efficiency with which the routine work of the association has been conducted, in the establishment of the weekly luncheons on Thursday noons, in the beginning of a system of "better acquaintance" tours, and in the movement for a convention hall in Burlington.

In a recent address to business men Commissioner Brigham appealed strongly for the co-operation of business men in the development of Vermont agriculture. In his closing words Mr. Brigham suggested a policy for the members of commercial and civic organizations as follows: "My friends, if the agriculture of Vermont is to be developed to the point where we begin to realize its tremendous possibilities, we must all work together to accomplish that end. Get out and get acquainted with the people of Vermont, try to understand the problem of the men on the farms, try to discover ways and means whereby you may work with them for the improvement of the state. Luke P. Fisher of Cabot, now a man in the evening of life, developed a Vermont farm to the point where 48 acres raised the roughage to feed 100 head of high producing Jersey cows. A man who could do this could succeed as a business man in any Vermont town or city. Get acquainted with such men, give them recognition. Let us in this little state of ours annihilate the barrier between county and city, let us work together with the hope of up-building a greater Vermont.

The Bennington County Vermont Improvement association issued October 1 the first number of its monthly publication, The Bennington County Review. This official organ of the association, designed to be a magazine rather than a newspaper, will reflect the aims, policies and achievements of the association. Reaching the entire county, it will seek to develop a county-community spirit, its object being suggested by the legend, "For a Greater Bennington County." The wide range of interests covered by the association and its monthly review is suggested by the principal subjects discussed in the first number: The playground and recreation movement in Bennington; roads and road economics; district nursing in Manchester and Dorset; farm notes and fall ploughing; good roads contests for schools, in which awards are given to the writers of the best essays on good roads and to the rural schools doing the best work in the maintenance of the roads in front of the schoolhouses.

A very significant and suggestive study of the rural schools of Windsor county has recently been published by the Windsor county Y. M. C. A. committee. Good conditions and bad conditions among the 97 schools visited have been summed up in numbered statements under 13 headings. Several pages of this systematically arranged and very specific information are followed by A Few Special Notations and an article, Some Impressions and Conclusions, by Secretary Archibald C. Hurd. The pamphlet is illustrated with 14 pictures and drawings. This study of conditions and need among the rural schools of Windsor county should be read by every one who is interested in education and rural life in Vermont.

BRATTLEBORO MARKETS.

Grain and Feed—Retail.

Corn	1.65
Mixed Feed	1.45
Oats, bu.	.57½@.60
Meal, cwt.	1.65@1.70
Meal, bolted, lb.	.02½@.03½
Bran	1.40@1.45
Linseed Oil Meal	1.80
Provender	1.70@1.75
Middlings	1.50@1.60
Hay, loose, ton	18.00
Hay, baled	24.00@25.00

Farm Produce—Wholesale.

Pork, dressed	.12
Pork, live weight	.09
Beef, dressed	.08@.10
Lamb	.06
Veal	.08@.09
Fowl, live	.15
Hides, lb.	.08
Calfskins, each	.50@1.00
Eggs, dozen	.35
Beans	2.50
Maple Syrup	.85@1.00
Butter	.30
Cheese	.18@.19

Groceries and Provisions—Retail.

Butter	.37@.40
Eggs, fresh, dozen	.45
Graham	.03½
Corn Bread Meal	.02
Sugar, refined....6c lb., 17lbs. for	1.00
Salt, T. I., bu.	.35
Flour, roll. pro., bbl.	6.00
Flour, patent	6.90
Raisins	.12
Molasses, gal.	.50@.60
Rye Meal, lb.	.03½
Tea, Japan, lb.	.35@.70
Tea, Oolong	.40@.80
Tea, Young Hyson	.40@.80
Linseed oil, gal.	.90
Kerosene, gal. ..... 12c., 5 gal, for	.55
Kerosene, best, gal. .15c., 5 gals. for	.70
Lemons, doz.	.35
Cheese, new	.22
Onions, per lb.	.04
Cabbage, lb	.04
Beans, qt.	.12
Beans, pk.	.85
Y. E. Beans	.12
Pure Lard, bucket	.16
Lard, compound	.14
Potatoes, pk.,	.25
Sugar Pails	.15
Brooms	.35@.50

Meats—Retail.

Pork Steak	.24
Pork Chops	.24
Veal Steak	.35
Pork roasts	.18@.24
Roasts, beef	.16@.30
Corned Beef	.10@.18
Porterhouse Steak	.35
Round Steak	.28
Leaf Lard	.14
Home-made Lard	.16
Hams	.22
Hams, minced	.20
Sliced Ham	.30
Lamb, hind quarter	.30
Lamb, fore quarter	.25
Lamb chops	.25@.35
Fowls	.25
Chickens	.30

TECH'S BIG GIFTS.

Mysterious Mr. Smiths Give $600,000 to the Institution.

BOSTON, Oct. 22.—Two new gifts to the Massachusetts of Technology from anonymous givers who have come to be known among "Tech" men as "mysterious Mr. Smiths," were announced at Boston yesterday. One is $500,000 for use on new "Tech" buildings and the other is $100,000 for use without restriction. With gifts previously announced the total now received from anonymous sources is $3,150,000. The first, with which the name of "Mr. Smith" was associated was $2,500,000 for new buildings. The second "Mr. Smith" gave to the summer surveying camp the money—about $50,000, with which to build permanent camp structures.

Uncle Sam's postage stamp collection is one of the finest in the world, and valued at $500,000, was placed for preservation by Postmaster General Hitchcock in the National museum.

BUSINESS CARDS.